

Nahum 2:14 Text-Critical Notes

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Abstract

Two reading traditions are reflected in the ancient witnesses to Nahum 2:14, which can be referred to as ‘masculine’ (4Q169) and ‘feminine’ (MT, T^J^{on}, P), depending on the implied referent of the suffixes in this verse. It is argued in this contribution that the textual history of Nahum 2:14 and the origins of these two reading traditions can be explained from the relationship between the Hebrew words רכב and רב, which presumably go back to a common source *רכבכה. This can be taken as evidence that the masculine reading of Nahum 2:14 is the more original one, whereas the feminine reading is the outcome of textual corruption.

Keywords

Book of Nahum, Textual Criticism, Peshet

Nahum 2:14¹ as it is transmitted in the mainstream of the Masoretic tradition (MT) and printed in our editions of the Hebrew Bible,² is problematic in at least two respects. First, the verse contains the enigmatic form מְלִאֲכָה, whose Masoretic vocalization appears to be an attempt to solve an underlying textual

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¹) In some translations this verse is given as Nahum 2:13. I shall use the verse numbers of MT.

²) The problems addressed here are found in both Codex Aleppo and Codex Leningrad and, hence, in all editions based on either one of these two manuscripts. Within the Masoretic tradition, there is some textual variety, but none of the preserved variants seems to be of major importance. Cf. B. Kennicott, *Vetus testamentum hebraicum cum variis lectionibus* (Oxford, 1780).

problem.³ Second, there is a discrepancy between the other suffixes in the verse, as a 3rd person sg. fem. suffix (רְכַבָּה) is found alongside three 2nd person sg. fem. ones (אֲלֵיךָ, וּכְפִירֶיךָ, וְטִרְפֶּךָ). Obviously, these two problematic aspects of Nahum 2:14 are closely related, and the difficulties in this verse can be summarized as follows: whereas, on contextual grounds, all suffixes in Nahum 2:14 seem to refer to one and the same antecedent, their morphological realization is variegated and, hence, confusing. Due to this incongruity, Nahum 2:14 as it is presented in the current editions of the Hebrew Bible hardly makes good sense.

In this article, I shall argue that two ways of reading Nahum 2:14 are attested in the ancient witnesses to this verse, each implying its own interpretation of the verse. Subsequently, the relationship between these two reading traditions is subjected to a philological and text-critical analysis and an attempt is made to reconstruct the earliest attainable text of this verse as well as the development of its textual history.

'Masculine' and 'Feminine' Readings of Nahum 2:14

Evidence from the ancient witnesses to Nahum 2:14 points to the existence of two ways of reading this verse, to which I shall refer as 'masculine' and 'feminine,' depending on the referent implied for the suffixes in the verse. The masculine reading tradition is attested in the *Nahum Peshar* from Qumran (4Q169), which in several instances contains masculine suffixes over against feminine ones in MT.⁴ In the only instance where these occur in a *lemma*, the Peshar reads וּכְפִירֶיכָה over against MT's וּכְפִירֶיךָ.⁵ Evidence from the interpretation seems to suggest that the noun מְלֹאךְ also had a masculine suffix in 4Q169.⁶ In addition to this, it appears that 4Q169 read רֹבְבָה 'your (masc.) multitude' where MT has רְכַבָּה.⁷ A different approach is taken towards the form טִרְפָּה, which occurs in a *lemma* in 4Q169 3-4 i 9. This word is not rendered with a 2nd sg. masc. suffix, but without a suffix altogether: טִרְפָּה is a feminine by-form

³ Cf. BHQ, p. 113*, where it is remarked that the suffix in MT 'seems to be a mixed form of 2 m. sg. (plene) and 2 f. sg.'

⁴ The official edition of 4Q169 is J. M. Allegro, "169. Commentary on Nahum," in *DJD* 5 (Oxford, 1968), pp. 37-42. This edition should, however, be used with caution; a good alternative is M.P. Horgan, "Nahum Peshar," in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Pesharim, Other Commentaries, and Related Documents* (PTSDSSP 6B; Tübingen/Louisville, 2002), pp. 144-155.

⁵ 4Q169 3-4 i 9.

⁶ 4Q169 3-4 ii 1 reads וּמְלֹאכֵי.

⁷ 4Q169 3-4 i 10.

of MT's טַרְפֵּי.⁸ The absence of a feminine suffix in 4Q169 strengthens the reference to a masculine antecedent.⁹ This masculine antecedent is to be found in the lion's pericope in Nahum 2:12-13. As all suffixes in Nahum 2:14 are in the singular, their most logical referent is the 'lion' (אַרְיֵה) of Nahum 2:12c-13, which metaphorically stands for the king of Nineveh.¹⁰

In contrast to the masculine reading tradition of Nahum 2:14 in 4Q169, a feminine reading tradition of this verse is reflected in MT, the Peshitta (P), and Targum Jonathan (T^{Jon}).¹¹ The Aramaic translations are most straightforward, and have 2nd sg. fem. suffixes attached to all nouns and prepositions in the verse.¹² MT also points to a univocally feminine reading of the verse, but displays a difference in person: most of its suffixes are 2nd sg. fem., while one is 3rd sg. The feminine reading tradition as it is found in these three witnesses implies the city of Nineveh, to which the book of Nahum is addressed and which is prophesized against in Nahum 2:9,¹³ as the antecedent of the suffixes in our verse. In sum, it can be concluded that two ways of reading Nahum 2:14 were known in Antiquity: a masculine one, which has the verse refer to the lion

⁸ Its use is probably inspired by Nahum 2:13d. Cf. S. L. Berrin, *The Peshet Nahum Scroll from Qumran: An Exegetical Study of 4Q169* (STDJ 53; Leiden, 2004), pp. 34, 56.

⁹ Note that the word obtains a masculine suffix in the interpretation: 4Q169 3-4 i i1 reads וטרפו.

¹⁰ The relevance of the number of the suffixes in Nahum 2:14 has not always been recognized. An exception is A.S. van der Woude, *Jona Nahum* (POT; Nijkerk, 1978), pp. 92, 110-112.

¹¹ For T^{Jon} I have used the CAL database (<http://cal.cn.huc.edu/>). For P, consult the Leiden edition: A. Gelston, *Vetus testamentum syriace* 3/4: Dodekapropheton-Daniel-Bel-Draco (Leiden, 1980).

¹² In P, the feminine suffix {-ky} is easily distinguishable from its masculine counterpart {-k}. In T^{Jon}, the situation is more complicated, as both masculine and feminine suffixes, when attached to a noun in the plural, take the form {-k}, the difference between them being one of vocalization. Given the fact that some of the suffixes in T^{Jon} to Nahum 2:14 are clearly 2nd sg. fem. (the {-yk}-suffixes attached to nouns in the singular: קְהוֹרְתֵי and אֲזַנְדֵי [A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic* 3 (Leiden, 1962), 456 has the plural אֲזַנְדֵי here]), it seems preferable to interpret the other suffixes in the verse (עֲלֵךְ, רְתִיכְךָ, and וְשִׁלְטוֹנֵךְ) as 2nd sg. fem. suffixes attached to a noun or preposition in the plural. This goes against the annotations of the CAL database, which parses the words רְתִיךָ and וְשִׁלְטוֹן as singular, as well as against BHQ, p. 112*, which states that 'the 2 m. sg. sfx. of 4QpNah is confirmed by T.' For the morphology of 2nd sg. masc. and fem. suffixes, see G. H. Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch nach den Idiomen des palästinischen Talmud, des Onkelostargum und Prophetentargum und der jerusalemischen Targume* (Darmstadt, 1905 [repr. 1960]), pp. 202-208, 395 (§ 41 and Anhang I).

¹³ Cf. Nahum 1:1.

in Nahum 2:12c–13, and a feminine one, which takes the city of Nineveh as the antecedent of the suffixes in the verse.¹⁴

These two reading traditions and the interpretation of Nahum 2:14 they imply should be treated in comparison with Nahum 3:5. The latter verse is very similar in wording to Nahum 2:14 and provides the only other occurrence of the so-called *Herausforderungsformel* in the book of Nahum. A detailed interpretation of Nahum 3:5 is beyond the scope of this article, but it is noteworthy that the verse refers back to the well-charmed harlot (זֹנֶה טוֹבֵת הַזֶּן) of Nahum 3:4, which stands metaphorically for the city of Nineveh.¹⁵ In other words: the suffixes employed in Nahum 3:5 all have a feminine antecedent. In contrast to Nahum 2:14, all ancient witnesses to Nahum 3:5 agree with this feminine reading of the verse: P and T^{Jon} have feminine suffixes attached to all nouns and prepositions in Nahum 3:5, and 4Q169, too, has the verse refer to a feminine antecedent.¹⁶ This suggests, at least *a priori*, that Nahum 3:5 has influenced the development of the feminine reading of Nahum 2:14, both in the MT and, possibly, in the versions. Before anything more specific can be said on this issue, however, it is necessary to philologically and text-critically analyze the two reading traditions of Nahum 2:14.

Philological and Text-Critical Analysis

To my mind, the *crux* from which the textual history of Nahum 2:14 and the development of its two reading traditions can be understood, is the relationship between the nouns רַב 'multitude' and רֶכֶב 'chariot,' which are both attested in the ancient witnesses to our verse, but never occur side by side.¹⁷ In

¹⁴ A feminine reading of Nahum 2:9–14 is also found with Josephus, who paraphrases these verses in *Ant.* 9:239–242. Josephus explicitly relates these verses, including the lion's metaphor in Nahum 2:12–14, to the city of Nineveh. See A. van der Kooij, "Josephus, Onkelos, and Jonathan: On the Agreements between Josephus' Works and Targumic Sources," in G. Khan and D. Lipton (eds.), *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon (VTSup 149; Leiden, 2012)*, pp. 253–67 (258).

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., H.-J. Fabry, *Nahum (HThKAT; Freiburg, 2006)*, pp. 194–196; K. Spronk, *Nahum (HCOT; Kampen, 1997)*, pp. 123–124; Van der Woude, *Nahum*, pp. 116–117.

¹⁶ See 4Q169 3–4 ii 10–11. The suffixes of [. . .]שולִי and [. . .]קלונִי have not been preserved, but the suffixes in אֱלִיךִי and פִּנִיךִי are clearly feminine. Furthermore, the interpretation seems to suggest that this verse was understood as referring to a city: 4Q169 3–4 ii 12 reads עֲרֵי הַמְזֹרָה, which is based on Nahum 3:5 cited just before.

¹⁷ LXX, 4Q169, and P bear witness to a form of the noun רַב; MT, MurXII, T^{Jon}, and the Vulgate (V) reflect a form of רֶכֶב. For another case of textual corruption involving the words רַב and רֶכֶב, see 2 Kings 19:23 (*Ktiv* and *Qre*) and its parallel in Isaiah 37:24.

the following analysis, I have indicated the position of the form רִכְבָּה in MT with the letter X, so as to prevent the impression of an *a priori* preference for either one of the two nouns discussed.

The Hebrew witnesses to Nahum 2:14 have two different readings for X: MT and, so it appears, MurXII have רִכְבָּה 'her chariot'; 4Q169 has רובכה 'your (masc.) multitude.' From what we know about the development of *plene* spelling in the Hebrew language and about Qumran orthography, it may be assumed that the form attested in 4Q169 goes back to a more original *רכבה.¹⁸ If this is accepted, the (proto-)Masoretic and Qumranic form of X may well be related to one another by means of metathesis: one of the two provides the earlier reading, which, by means of an interchange between *kaf* and *bet*, brings forth the other.¹⁹ Notwithstanding this possible relationship between MT and MurXII on the one hand and 4Q169 on the other, however, it seems that neither of these two witnesses contain the earliest attainable form of our verse as a whole. After all, both MT–MurXII and 4Q169 display signs of textual corruption. For instance, the reading רִכְבָּה in MT and MurXII can hardly be considered original, as its parallel טרפך demands a 2nd sg. suffix for X.²⁰ Furthermore, the Masoretic form מְלֹאֲכָה is clearly corrupt. In the case of 4Q169, traces of textual corruption can be found with the noun טרפה. Here, again, a suffix is required, this time on the basis of the parallel clause with X: the Qumranic reading is a secondary adaptation on the basis of Nahum 2:13d.

This leads to the follow-up question whether a text-form can be identified from which both the reading in MT–MurXII and that in 4Q169 can be explained. To my mind, this is possible if we assume that a form *רכבה 'your (masc.) chariot' is the common source for both the reading in MT–MurXII and that in 4Q169. In this case, haplography involving the first *kaf* and the *bet* of *רכבה brought forth the reading *רכבה, which is behind 4Q169's רובכה and is furthermore reflected in LXX and P.²¹ Another case of haplography, this time involving the second *kaf* and the *bet* of *רכבה, brought forth the reading רכבה which is found in MT and MurXII and is reflected in V's reading *quadrigas eius*.

Apart from this textual reconstruction, some additional arguments can be adduced for the originality of the form *רכבה. First, the noun רכב is used

¹⁸ On these topics, see, e.g., E. Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta, 1986); A. Saénz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (transl. J.F. Elwolde; Cambridge, 1993).

¹⁹ Cf. BHQ, p. 112*; Fabry, *Nahum*, p. 164.

²⁰ The two cola וְהִכְרַתִּי מֵאֲרִיז טְרַפְךָ and וְהִבְעַרְתִּי בְעֶשֶׂן רִכְבָּה parallel one another both syntactically and semantically.

²¹ LXX has πλῆθὺς σσν. On P, see below.

elsewhere in the book of Nahum in descriptions of the enemy's army.²² In other books of the Hebrew Bible, this noun has a similar military connotation.²³ The word רב, by contrast, does not have such an explicitly military ring to it. Even though it could at times refer to multitudes slain in battle,²⁴ רב occurs in a wide variety of contexts and is not specifically related to warfare.²⁵ This shows that the reading רכב fits the context of our verse and that of the book of Nahum as a whole better than the reading רב, as it ties in with previous descriptions of the enemy's armies as well as the military language employed in Nahum 2:14.

Second, as has been shown above, the masculine reading of our verse takes the אֲרִיָה from Nahum 2:12c-13 as the referent of the suffixes in Nahum 2:14. Thus, if it can be argued that the suffixes in Nahum 2:14 refer back to Nahum 2:12c-13 rather than to Nahum 2:9 (where antecedent of the feminine reading of Nahum 2:14 can be found), this is an additional argument in support of the originality of the masculine reading. To my mind, this is indeed possible, as Nahum 2:14 should be accepted as the last verse of the lion's pericope in Nahum 2:12-14. After all, our verse explicitly takes up key phrases from the lion's metaphor in the preceding verses and speaks, for instance, of 'your whelps' and 'your prey.' Of course, these terms metaphorically indicate the military commanders of Nineveh and their gain, but this should not confuse the fact that these terms explicitly refer back to the preceding verses and continue the lion's metaphor employed therein.²⁶ Thus, the most likely referent for the suffixes in Nahum 2:14 is the lion from Nahum 2:12c-13 rather than the city of Nineveh from Nahum 2:9. This conclusion also points to the originality of the masculine suffixes in Nahum 2:14.

Accepting, thus, the conjecture *רכבכה as the earliest attainable form of X, I assume that it is the haplography involving the second *kaf* and the *bet* of this form which brought about the feminine reading tradition of Nahum 2:14. This haplography triggered a re-interpretation of the Hebrew consonant text of Nahum 2:14, so as to harmonize all other suffixes in this verse with the newly formed 3rd sg. fem. suffix. After all, a reference to a feminine antecedent, as is implied in the form רַכְבָּה, hardly makes any sense in a context which has univocally masculine suffixes. The discord between feminine and masculine

²² Nahum 2:4-5. In Nahum 3:2, the noun מַרְכָּבָה fulfills the same purpose.

²³ Cf. the usual dictionaries *sub* רכב.

²⁴ Nahum 3:3. Cf. 2 Kings 19:23 (par. Isaiah 37:24), where both terms occur (see n. 17 above).

²⁵ Cf. the usual dictionaries *sub* רב.

²⁶ Cf. כפיר in Nahum 2:12b, 14c; טרף in Nahum 2:13a, cd, 14d; and טרפה in Nahum 2:13d.

suffixes in Nahum 2:14 is aggravated by the fact that the new feminine suffix is in the 3rd sg, while all masculine suffixes are in the 2nd sg. In this case, a re-interpretation of the 2nd sg. masc. suffixes as 2nd sg. fem. ones would be felt to lend better sense to the verse. Such a re-interpretation took place on at least two levels. On the most elementary level, it consisted in straightforward re-vocalization: the regular 2nd sg. masc. suffixes, spelled with final *kaf*, were vocalized /-ayik/ or /-ek/ rather than /-êka/ or /-ka/. See the forms אֱלִיָּךְ, וּבְפָרְיֶךָ, and טְרַפְּךָ in MT over against the assumed original forms *אֱלִיָּךְ, *וּבְפָרְיֶךָ, and *טְרַפְּךָ. On a second and somewhat more sophisticated level, the form מְלֹאכְכֶּה, which in all likelihood originally read מְלֹאכְכֶּה, had to be adapted to this feminine reading.²⁷ Its spelling can be considered somewhat atypical, but not really unexpected, let alone inexplicable.²⁸ The most suitable solution to this problematic orthography was felt to be a re-vocalization, with the reading /-ekê/ invoking the impression of a 2nd sg. fem. suffix.

In his defense of MT of Nahum 2:14, Klaas Spronk wonders rhetorically why the Masoretes would have accepted a contextually problematic form such as רַבְּכָה. He rightly asserts that ‘it cannot be excluded that they had their reasons.’²⁹ I would assume that Nahum 3:5 played an important role in the retention of the feminine reading of Nahum 2:14 in the (proto-)Masoretic tradition. As has been shown above, both the context and the textual history of Nahum 3:5 are quite straightforward: the verse clearly refers to the city of Nineveh, which is presented in Nahum 3:4 as a well-charmed harlot, and all witnesses agree on this point. To my mind, the similarities between this verse and Nahum 2:14, both on a syntactic level and on the level of content, provide a background against which the survival of the feminine reading of Nahum 2:14, notwithstanding its differences, can be understood.³⁰ Furthermore, it can be assumed that this feminine reading tradition originated rather early within the textual history of Nahum 2:14, and that later authorities saw no reason to consider it particularly problematic. All this, however, does not make this feminine reading tradition the more original one.

In sum, the following can be said. First, the masculine reading of Nahum 2:14, which implies an original form *רַבְּכָה for X, can be concluded to be

²⁷ The consonantal text could point to either a plural or a singular. In my reconstruction of the form, I follow Van der Woude, *Nahum*, p. 110, who reads a defectively spelled plural מְלֹאכְכֶּה.

²⁸ J. Barr, *The Variable Spellings of the Hebrew Bible* (*The Schweich Lectures 1986*; Oxford, 1989), pp. 114–127.

²⁹ Spronk, *Nahum*, p. 109.

³⁰ Cf. the suggestion of Van der Woude, *Nahum*, pp. 110, 136 (n. 38) that the feminine suffixes in Nahum 2:14 may have been inspired by those in Nahum 3:5.

original, both on the basis of the ancient witnesses and on contextual grounds. Second, an haplography involving the first *kaf* and the *bet* of this original form **רכבכה* brought about the readings attested to by 4Q169, LXX, and P. Third, by means of another haplography, involving the second *kaf* and the *bet* of the original form, the readings attested to by MT, MurXII, and V developed. Fourth, this latter haplography triggered what I have identified as the feminine reading tradition of Nahum 2:14, which aimed to harmonize the suffixes in this verse with the newly introduced 3rd sg. fem. suffix /-â/.

Some last words need to be devoted to the readings of T^{Jon} and P. First of all, T^{Jon}, as we have seen, has a plural *רְתִיכָה* where MT has a singular *רַכְבָּה*. To my mind, it can be assumed that T^{Jon} goes back to an MT-like *Vorlage*.³¹ The plural number of the noun *רְתִיכָה* can then be understood as an explication of the collective element in the Hebrew, which uses a singular form, but clearly does not refer to just one chariot.³² The 2nd sg. fem. suffix is, in all likelihood, the outcome of a harmonization with the other suffixes in the verse. P's reading *חַבְּתִי* is more intricate, as it combines a noun 'multitude' with a feminine instead of a masculine suffix. This may suggest that P is to be positioned relatively late in the textual history of Nahum 2:14, in a time where both haplographies involving the original form **רכבכה* had already occurred, and P could combine the new reading 'multitude' (*רכבה*) with the newly formed feminine reading of Nahum 2:14. Alternatively, P's reading may be explained by assuming that the feminine suffixes in Nahum 3:5 (P) triggered the reading of feminine suffixes in Nahum 2:14 (P), just as this may have happened in MT.³³ Yet another explanation may assume that P had an MT-like *Vorlage* and combined a feminine reading of the verse with the reading 'multitude' culled from LXX.³⁴

Conclusion

In the textual development of Nahum 2:14 as I have reconstructed it above, 4Q169, which has preserved the original masculine reading of this verse, plays a prominent role.³⁵ All other witnesses of which the gender of the suffixes can be determined, have Nahum 2:14 refer to a feminine antecedent. This may be

³¹ Cf. Robert P. Gordon, *Studies in the Targum to the Twelve Prophets: From Nahum to Maleachi* (VTSup 51; Leiden, 1994), p. 65.

³² V does the same when it reads *quadrigas eius*.

³³ I thank the anonymous reviewer of *Vetus Testamentum* for this suggestion.

³⁴ A. Gelston, *The Peshitta of the Twelve Prophets* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 167–169 (168).

³⁵ Cf. Berrin, *Pesher Nahum*, pp. 55–57.

explained by the influence exerted by the (proto-)Masoretic tradition, from which 4Q169 is known to divert relatively often in comparison to other Pesharim.³⁶ This begs the question to what extent textual or exegetical traditions alternative or even superior to the (proto-)Masoretic ones can be discovered in the Pesharim. While we are still awaiting a full-fledged philological and text-critical analysis of the Pesharim, the inclusion of variant readings from the Qumran commentaries in editions of the Hebrew Bible, as has been the policy of BHQ, is an important step in the right direction.

³⁶ T. H. Lim, *Holy Scripture in the Qumran Commentaries and Pauline Letters* (Oxford, 1997), p. 90 (Table 8).